



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

Bureau of Community and Environmental Health

Lead Exposure and Adult Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

What is adult Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?

People who have ADHD can be identified by three types of behavior: they are impulsive (act without stopping to think), they are inattentive (easily distracted, forgetful, not careful), and they are hyperactive (restless, fidgety, have difficulty sitting quietly). This behavior causes many problems in everyday life for people with ADHD.

ADHD usually develops in children before the age of 6. For many years it was not known that ADHD can remain a problem when those children grow up. Now experts believe that 30-70% of people who had ADHD as a child will still have behavior problems as an adult. Many adults with ADHD were never diagnosed as children and, therefore, do not know they have a health problem that can be treated.

Other problems often exist with ADHD, such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and personality disorders. These should be considered during diagnosis and treatment of ADHD because treating ADHD may not improve these other problems. ADHD can be detected by a psychiatrist or another specialist based on a careful health history, self-questionnaires, and other psychological testing. There is no blood test or other lab test for ADHD.

What is the relationship between lead exposure and adult ADHD?

Lead exposure can affect the brain and nervous system in many ways, especially in children. Children with the highest levels of lead exposure usually have the worst effects, but even low levels of lead exposure can be harmful. One possible effect of lead exposure is childhood ADHD. People who were exposed to lead as children may have developed ADHD at the time, and then grown into adults who have ADHD.

What are the symptoms of adult ADHD?

People with ADHD can be:

- Easily distracted.
- Disorganized and not able to plan ahead.
- Not able to concentrate or pay attention.
- Not able to finish one task before starting another.
- Hyperactive, impulsive, restless, bored, impatient, moody, and short-tempered.
- Underachievers in school and jobs.
- Prone to having problems with relationships.

What can help people with adult ADHD?

The most effective treatment combines medication, counseling, and skills training.

- Prescription medications, such as certain stimulants or antidepressants.
- Counseling, such as cognitive or behavioral therapy. These help with self-esteem, social skills, managing moods, and vocational choices.
- Self-management skills, such as: how to plan ahead, time management, organization, and how to live with the disability.
- Good mental health habits, such as: getting regular exercise, maintaining a sense of humor, minimizing drug or alcohol use, rewarding yourself for progress, and avoiding harsh self-criticism.